



# *Family Health History Toolkit*

Produced by the  
Utah Department of Health

*Make Family Health History a Tradition*

[www.health.utah.gov/genomics](http://www.health.utah.gov/genomics)



*Make Family Health History a Tradition*

Project partners:

Utah Department of Health

LDS Family History Library

Intermountain Health Care, Clinical Genetics Institute

Salt Lake County Aging Services, Healthy Aging Program

Huntsman Cancer Institute

Utah Genealogical Association

Heirlines Family History and Genealogy

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American Heart Association

Utah's Local Health Departments

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# *Make Family Health History a Tradition*



For many of us, Thanksgiving Day is filled with memories of spending time with family and enjoying a dinner complete with buttery rolls, a golden-brown turkey, and let's not forget the pumpkin pies. It's the time of year when we think about the things we are grateful for. But did you know that learning about your family health history could be the most important tradition you make this Thanksgiving?

The Family Health History Toolkit will help you talk about your family health history, write down what you learn, and then share it with your doctor and family members. Take it to your Thanksgiving dinner or next family get-together and make family health history a tradition!

“Knowing your family history can save your life.

The earlier you know which health conditions run in your family, the easier it is to develop prevention plans with your doctor. Start the conversation with your family on National Family History Day – celebrated every Thanksgiving.”

– Dr. Richard H. Carmona, MD, MPH,  
U.S. Surgeon General

## **Talk about it**

The holidays are a perfect time to talk about your family health history. Not only can it be fun, but it could save your life. Use the **10 Questions to Ask Your Family at Thanksgiving** on page 6 or the **“Turkey Talk” Health Discussion** fact sheet to help you talk with your family members about your family health history. Or you can try the one-on-one approach on page 2. Then use the Health Family Tree to write down what you have learned. You can also use the **How to Talk with Your Family** fact sheet for other fun ideas to get your family talking.

Fun tip: Instead of a tablecloth, use sheets of butcher paper to cover the table and put crayons out for everyone to color with. Write down what your family knows about their family health history. Then go around the table and share what each of you wrote down.

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## One-on-one approach

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If some of your family members don't want to talk about your family health history, try talking one-on-one with those who have a chronic health problem. You may already know which family members have a health problem or you may need to ask others to help you find them. Talk with these family members and help them make the link between their health and the rest of your family's health, including younger family members who may not have developed the problem yet. Talk with them as you finish peeling the potatoes, setting the table, or eating pumpkin pie – anytime that will get you talking about your family health history.

Below are some talking points to help you talk with your family members:

- I know that you have (for example, diabetes). I recently learned that diabetes can run in families and that having a family history of diabetes can increase our family members' risk of getting it too. Do you mind if I ask you some questions about diabetes?
- When did your diabetes start? What choices have you made to stay healthy?
- We need to know about the health of our family members. By knowing this we can make choices to lower our risk of getting these problems. Do you know if other family members had or have a chronic health problem?
- Don't wait to make healthy choices. With or without a family history of a health problem, we have the power to keep ourselves and loved ones healthy. By exercising, not smoking, and eating a healthy diet we can keep ourselves healthy. Screening tests can also detect risk factors, like high cholesterol or high blood pressure, which can be treated early to lower the chances of getting a chronic health problem.

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Fun tips: To help make Thanksgiving more healthy, go on a walk or play a game of flag football before you eat – just get moving.

Or have a contest with your family to see who can turn your family's secret pie recipe or other favorite dish into a more healthy treat by substituting healthy ingredients in place of high-fat and high-calorie ones.

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## Write it down

Don't forget all the great stories and health information your family talked about – write it down! We've made it easy for you – just complete your own Health Family Tree. The instructions are boxed below.

Each box on the Health Family Tree should be used for one family member. Start with the box labeled “You” and fill out your health history. Then fill out a box for your brothers and sisters, parents, grandparents, and aunts and uncles. Try to fill out each box as much as you can. If you don't know if a family member had the health problem, mark “Not Sure”. Write down the age when the problem started, even a guess is better than leaving it blank. If you find health problems that run in your family are not listed, write them down anyway.

# 1

## YOU

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

Year of birth \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ ☐ Male ☐ Female

Has he/she ever been told BY A DOCTOR that he/she suffers from any of the following health problems?

YES	NO	NOT SURE	AGE AT FIRST DIAGNOSIS	Condition
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	Heart Attack (hospitalized)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	Coronary bypass surgery
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	Rheumatic or other heart disease
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	Stroke
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	Breast cancer
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	Colon cancer
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	Hip fracture
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	Asthma
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	Alzheimer's disease
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	High blood pressure (on medication)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	High blood cholesterol
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	Diabetes

**CIGARETTE SMOKING**

☐ Smoker: Has smoked cigarettes regularly for at least 1 year

☐ Ex-smoker: Stopped for at least 1 year after smoking regularly

☐ Non-smoker: Never smoked cigarettes regularly

☐ Not Sure

IF SMOKER OR EX-SMOKER mark average amount smoked

☐ Less than 1 pack a day

☐ About 1 pack a day

☐ More than 1 pack a day

**USUAL WEIGHT**

☐ Slender or average

☐ 50-99 lbs. overweight

☐ 10-49 lbs. overweight

☐ Over 100 lbs. overweight

☐ Not Sure

**ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES** (beer, wine, liquor)?

☐ Regularly

☐ Sometimes

☐ Never

☐ Former

☐ Not Sure

**Vigorous ROUTINE EXERCISE** at least 3 times per week?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not Sure





These other websites can also help you complete a family health history.

- U.S. Surgeon General Family History Initiative  
[www.hhs.gov/familyhistory](http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Family History website  
[www.cdc.gov/genomics/public/famhistMain.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/genomics/public/famhistMain.htm)
- National Society of Genetic Counselors  
[www.nsgc.org](http://www.nsgc.org)

Mark your calendar! In 2006, you can update your Health Family Tree online at [www.health.utah.gov/genomics](http://www.health.utah.gov/genomics).

Fun Tip: Make a copy of the Health Family Tree box on page 3 for each family member. Then, cut the boxes out and use them as place cards. Have everyone fill out their box and talk about what they wrote.

### Share it with your doctor

Now that you've talked with your family and written down your family health history, it's time to share what you learned with your doctor and other family members. Use the questions boxed below as a guide for sharing your family health history with your doctor.

- Based on my family history of (for example, diabetes), am I at risk for diabetes?
- Would making lifestyle changes like eating a healthy diet, exercising, or not smoking lower my risk?
- Are there screening tests I can take to detect the health problem in my family (for example, diabetes) early?
- Do I need to talk with a genetic counselor or other specialist about my risk or my family members' risk?



## Share it with your family members

Sign and make copies of the note below, and attach it to the **Questions and Answers** fact sheet. Then give it to your family members. This note will remind them why a family health history is important. You can also use this example to write your own note.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

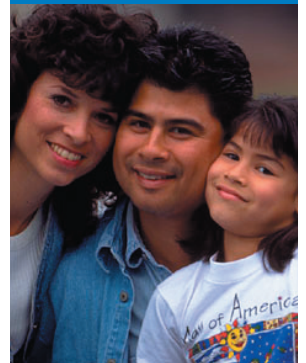
You are an important part of my family and I care about your health. I learned that health problems that tend to run in our family can increase your chance of getting the same problem, and I wanted to share this with you.

People may know they have family members with health problems like cancer, diabetes or heart disease, but may not know that a family history of these puts them at risk too.

Knowing your family health history can help you do things to protect yourself and loved ones.

Please read the attached fact sheet. If a health problem runs in our family, talk to your doctor about ways to keep yourself and other family members healthy, so we can all attend many more holidays together.

Love, \_\_\_\_\_



## Let us know how it went

Did your family members enjoy your new tradition? Did they learn something new? Did they have questions? Was this toolkit helpful to you? We would love to hear your stories.

Send an email to [genomics@utah.gov](mailto:genomics@utah.gov) or write us a letter and send it to: Utah Department of Health Genomics Program PO Box 142106 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-2106. We want to make this toolkit useful for families, so your comments will be greatly appreciated.



# *Make Family Health History a Tradition*

## 10 Questions to Ask Your Family at Thanksgiving



1. What traits seem to run in our family? (You don't have to only ask about health, start with anything from your family's blue eyes or curly hair to your height and personality – just get your family talking.)
2. Did any of my family members have a health problem? (Examples: Alzheimer's disease, arthritis, asthma, birth defects, cancer, depression, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, and stroke)
3. Were there any miscarriages or stillbirths? Were any babies born with birth defects?
4. How old were my family members when their health problem started or was diagnosed?
5. How old were my family members when they died? (If you don't know exact dates, ask about the approximate age at death.)
6. What were the reasons they died? (Note if the cause of death was unknown.)
7. Where were my family members born? What is our ethnic background? (Ethnicity can be a risk factor for some health problems.)
8. Did any of my relatives smoke? How much and for how long?
9. What other lifestyle habits did my family members have? (Examples: Did they exercise regularly? Were any overweight or extremely thin? What sort of food did they eat? Did any have addictive behaviors, such as drinking excessively?)
10. What types of allergies, whether hay fever, reactions to food, or medications, did family members have?

### References:

- Daus, Carol. *Past Imperfect: How tracing your family medical history can save your life.* California: Santa Monica Press, 1999.
- MayoClinic.com How to compile your family medical history

Contact the Utah Department of Health Chronic Disease Genomics Program for more information, (801) 538-9416 or visit our website below.





# *Make Family Health History a Tradition*

## **“Turkey Talk” health discussion**



If you have time – and think your family members would be open to a short talk – think about having a “Turkey Talk” health discussion. This outline will help you tell your family members why a family health history is important, how to collect one, and what to do with it.

Here’s how the “Turkey Talk” works. Talking points are boxed in green and will explain what a family health history is all about. Feel free to use your own words so your family members feel comfortable. You don’t need to be an expert to talk about family health history. The “Turkey Talk” outlines what to say. Get everyone to join in the fun but be mindful of family members who may not want to talk about their family health history.

### **1. Introduce the “Turkey Talk”**

I want to talk about the health problems in our family. I feel this is important because I have learned that health problems, such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, can run in families. Having a family history of these may increase your risk of getting them. I want us all to have many more holidays together, so I want to share this with you:

Why should we know our family health history?

- Because having a family history of a health problem is common – almost everyone has a family history of something.
- Because it is very likely that some of us are at risk. Some of us may know it, and others may not.
- Because collecting a family health history can be fun.
- And because there’s good news – knowing your family health history can save your life. I want to make sure we all know that even if a health problem tends to run in our family, we can make healthy choices to lower our chance of getting it.

### **2. Talk about risk factors**

Family health history is more than just genetics. Many families also share their lifestyles, habits and environment. These risk factors may affect your tendency to develop a health problem. Keep in mind that your family members may know that they or other members of the family have a health problem. But they

may not know that this means other family members could have an increased risk of getting the problem too. They may also not know that other risk factors affect the tendency to develop the problem. What do your family members know about these risk factors?

What health problems tend to run in our family?

What do we know about risk factors that may increase the chance to develop these chronic health problems?

Give family members a chance to offer ideas. You're likely to get a variety of answers. But some of the most common risk factors for getting chronic health problems are: diet, weight, exercise habits, smoking, and not following screening guidelines. Having a close family member with the problem can also be a risk factor.

Smoking, eating an unhealthy diet, being overweight, and not getting enough exercise are some of the most common risk factors of chronic health problems. A family history also increases a person's chance of getting the problem.

But the good news is, even if you have a family history of a health problem, you can lower your chance of getting it. Eating a healthy diet, exercising, maintaining a healthy weight, and not smoking are ways that we can each stay healthy.

You can't change your genes but in many cases, simply making healthy choices can reduce your tendency for health problems that run in your family.



### 3. Talk about how to collect a family health history

Once you've told your family members why you want to know more about your family health history, you're ready to collect one. Remind your family that this will be useful for not only themselves but children and grandchildren as well.

To get started, ask your family members to tell you a story about one of your family members, maybe a grandparent. Ask about where they worked and lived or what they looked like – anything to get your family talking. Then ask if your family member had any health problems. Use the [10 Questions to Ask Your Family at Thanksgiving](#) fact sheet to guide your questions.

To get a free Family Health History Toolkit or Health Family Tree to collect your family health history visit [www.health.utah.gov/genomic](http://www.health.utah.gov/genomic) or call the Health Resource Line at 1-888-222-2542.

#### 4. Talk about what to do if you are worried about your risk

So, what do you do if you are worried about your family health history? Talk to your doctor. Your doctor can help you understand your risk for a health problem, based on your family health history and other risk factors you may have. Your doctor can also give you recommendations about lifestyle choices and screening tests that can detect problems early and lower your chances of having a problem.

A family may have a high risk to develop a health problem because several of the family members developed the problem at a younger age. These families may want to talk with a genetic counselor or other specialist to learn what they can do to prevent or delay disease. Genetic testing may be helpful in some cases. But even for families with an increased risk to develop a problem, steps can be taken to lower the chance of getting the health problem.

#### 5. Ask family members to look out for each other

Here are two ways to follow up with family members who may have a tendency to develop a health problem based on your family health history.

- If your family is one that talks openly about their health, you may already know which members of your family have a health problem. Make a list of these family members and ask for their contact information. Give them a follow up call, email, letter, or visit some time over the next three months to talk to them about your family health history. Tell them to talk to their doctor about steps they can take to keep themselves and their loved ones healthy. A friendly reminder gives you and other family members a chance to learn more about your family health history and talk about ways you can stay healthy.
- Have family members pick a “family health buddy” that they feel comfortable talking with. Ask family health buddies to follow up with each other at some point over the next three months to talk about what they have learned from their family health history. If your family didn’t know a lot about your family health history, ask health buddies to find out more. The health buddy can also encourage family members to talk to their doctor about what they can do to stay healthy.

#### 6. End the “Turkey Talk”

Thank your family for their help. If you would like to give your family members copies of the toolkit and fact sheets, or to get a free Health Family Tree to collect your family health history, visit [www.health.utah.gov/genomics](http://www.health.utah.gov/genomics) or call the Health Resource Line at 1-888-222-2542.





# *Make Family Health History a Tradition*

## Questions and Answers

### Why is my family health history important?

Health problems that run in your family can increase your chance of developing the problem. This is because family members share their genetics, environment, lifestyles, and habits. But the good news is by knowing your family health history you can make screening and lifestyle choices to lower your risk.

### What information should I collect?

Collect information on close family members, such as parents, brothers and sisters, and children. Then collect information on your grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins. Things that are important to collect include:

- Health problems of family members
- Age when the problem started or was diagnosed
- Age and cause of death
- Lifestyle habits (smoker/nonsmoker, diet, weight, and exercise habits)
- Ethnic background

### What health problems should I ask my family about?

A family health history is a useful tool for understanding your tendency to develop just about any health problem. Here are some of the health problems you should ask your family about:

- Alzheimer's or dementia
- Arthritis
- Asthma
- Cancers (breast, colon, lung, prostate, ovarian, and other)
- Diabetes
- Depression
- Heart disease or sudden heart attack
- High blood pressure or high cholesterol
- Stroke or blood clots
- Stillbirths, miscarriages, or babies born with birth defects

### How do I know if I'm at risk for a health problem?

Everyone's family health history is different. It is important to talk with family members so you become aware of key features in your family history that may increase your chance of having a health problem. These key features help you to know if you are at an increased risk:

- Health problems that occur at an earlier age than expected (10 to 20 years before most people get the disease)
- A health problem in more than one close family member



# *Make Family Health History a Tradition*

## Questions and Answers

- A health problem that does not usually affect a certain gender (for example, breast cancer in a male family member)
- Certain combinations of health problems within a family (for example, breast and ovarian cancer or heart disease and diabetes)

If your family has one or more of these features, you may have an increased risk of developing a problem. Your doctor can explain your risk or refer you for a genetic consultation and help you make healthy choices about screening tests and lifestyle changes. But don't forget that you can lower your risk by eating a healthy diet, exercising, maintaining a healthy weight, and not smoking.

### **What if I don't have health problems that run in my family?**

Not having a health problem that runs in your family can be good news. But even without a family history, you can still develop a problem. This is because:

- Your lifestyle, personal health history, and environment affect risk
- You may be unaware of health problems in family members
- A family member may have died young before they developed a health problem

Make healthy choices no matter what your family health history is.

### **What should I do with my family health history after I've collected it?**

Share what you have learned with your doctor and family members. Pass on your family health history to your children and grandchildren. By sharing this with them, you can work together to make healthy choices that could save your lives. And remember to keep your family health history updated and in a safe place.

### **How do I get started?**

Getting started is easy! Simply talk with your family at reunions, holidays, or other family gatherings. Then write down what you learn and share it with your doctor and family members. Download the free Family Health History Toolkit at [www.health.utah.gov/genomics](http://www.health.utah.gov/genomics) for ideas to help you talk with your family and collect a family health history.

#### References

- CDC Office of Genomics and Disease Prevention [www.cdc.gov/genomics](http://www.cdc.gov/genomics)
- U.S. Surgeon General Family History Initiative [www.hhs.gov/familyhistory](http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory)
- National Society of Genetic Counselors [www.nsgc.org](http://www.nsgc.org)
- Daus, Carol. Past Imperfect: How tracing your family medical history can save your life. California: Santa Monica Press, 1999.





# *Make Family Health History a Tradition*

## *How to Talk with Your Family*

Do you need some fun ideas to get your family talking about your family health history? Try some of these ideas to help get a conversation going. Even if your family doesn't want to talk about their family health history, you can use these ideas to collect your family health history and then share it with others.

- Write a chapter on your family health history in your personal history.
- Instead of using a tablecloth, use sheets of butcher paper to cover the table and put crayons out for everyone to color with. Write down what you know about your family health history on the paper and then share what you wrote.
- Bring a copy of your family health history to your summer family reunion. Or make some time during your summer reunion to talk with your family members about your family health history.
- Take your child or grandchild to your Family History Center to research your family health history and fill out a Health Family Tree together. To find a center near you visit, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org).
- Complete a Health Family Tree and give it as a Christmas or birthday gift.
- Pick a family member to be your "family health buddy." Then work together to learn more about your family health history.
- Add a section on family health history to your family newsletter. Ask other family members to get involved with collecting your family health history.
- Add your family health history to your baby's keepsake book. Or if you have a new grandchild, give a copy of your family health history to their parents.
- Turn your family health history into a mystery game. Write the names of your family members on pieces of paper and put them in a hat or box. Then, take turns pulling one piece of paper out of the hat or box and guess what health problems your family member had or died from.
- Write a letter to your family members telling them how important you think knowing your family health history is.
- Turn family health history into a fun youth project for school or church. Family health history can even count towards earning Boy Scout and Girl Scout merit badges and other awards.

To get a free Family Health History Toolkit and Health Family Tree to collect your family health history, call the Health Resource Line at 1-888-222-2542 or visit our website below.

*Family Health History Toolkit*  
[www.health.utah.gov/genomics](http://www.health.utah.gov/genomics)



# *Make Family Health History a Tradition*

## **When to Get a Genetic Consultation**

After collecting your family health history, you may be concerned that you have an increased risk for developing a health problem. Most people do not have a high risk for a health problem based on their family health history. But in some cases, it may be appropriate for them to talk with a genetic counselor or other trained specialist. Genetic testing may also be an option for some families. You should always share your concerns with your doctor before seeking any testing.

### **Who should talk to a genetic counselor?**

If your family has one of more of these features, there may be an increased risk of developing a health problem. In this case, you need to share your concerns with your doctor and possibly talk with a genetic counselor.

- Health problems that occur at an earlier age than expected (10 to 20 years before most people get the disease)
- A health problem in more than one close family member
- A health problem that does not usually affect a certain gender (for example, breast cancer in a male family member)
- Certain combinations of health problems within a family (for example, breast and ovarian cancer or heart disease and diabetes)
- Birth defects, growth or development problems, pregnancy concerns, and other known genetic conditions in the family

### **What will I learn from a genetic counselor?**

A genetic counselor will help you:

- Assess your risk for a health problem based on your family health history
- Diagnose a health problem and causes for it
- Decide if genetic testing is an option
- Give you facts about treatment or management of the problem
- Refer you and your family members to support groups and resources

### **Where can I learn more?**

Huntsman Cancer Institute, [www.huntsmanccancer.org](http://www.huntsmanccancer.org)

- For an appointment with a genetic counselor, call the Family Cancer Assessment Clinic at 801-587-9555
- For other questions, call 801-585-0100 or toll-free 866-275-0243

Intermountain Health Care, Clinical Genetics Institute

- For questions or to speak with a genetic specialist, call 801-408-5014

University of Utah Hospital

- For genetic counseling and patient care issues, call 801-581-8943

March of Dimes website, [www.marchofdimes.com](http://www.marchofdimes.com)

*Family Health History Toolkit*  
[www.health.utah.gov/genomics](http://www.health.utah.gov/genomics)



# Make Family Health History a Tradition

## Genealogy Resources

### Introduction

Many health problems tend to run in families. Knowing your family's health history can be life-saving and fun too. Living relatives are not only the best source of family health history, they are also the ones who will benefit the most from it. The **Family Health History Toolkit** will help you 1) talk with your relatives about family health history, 2) write down what you learn, and 3) share it.

Following are genealogical sources to help you learn what living relatives may not know about your family health history.

### Death Records

Death records usually mention the cause and date of death, making them second only to living family members for family health information. These records were originally kept for public health purposes—to alert officials of diseases or trends of concern, especially in cities and populated areas.

City or county officials typically record the death information and forward copies to the state. As a result, there are often both a county and a state copy. There may be differences in the two sets, where photocopyers and computers were not used.

#### *How to obtain death records*

First, search an index, if available. An increasing number of statewide indexes are appearing on the Internet. Search (using Google.com, MSN.com, or other search engine) by name of the state with keywords such as “death index.” Indexes may be available at [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) (free at Family History Library), or links to indexes may be found on CyndisList at [www.cyndislist.com/usvital.htm#States](http://www.cyndislist.com/usvital.htm#States).

Next obtain a copy of the record. Many will be available at the Family History Library (FHL). Do a Place Search in the FHL Catalog for the state and the county levels. Big cities may also have records.

For records not at the FHL, see:

- Find addresses for state vital records offices at [www.vitalrec.com](http://www.vitalrec.com) and at CyndisList, previously cited.
- For records at the county level, use Everton's HandyBook for Genealogists (Logan, UT: Everton Publishers, 1999. FHL book 973 D27e)

### Funeral Home Records

Funeral homes are a wonderful source of family health history. Their records often go back to around 1900, even when ownership has changed. In many states, new owners were required by law to keep the old records.



# Make Family Health History a Tradition

## Genealogy Resources

Funeral homes often assisted in recording the death certificate and obituary. Therefore, these records may have even more detail about the cause of death. Funeral programs will name relatives who participated and whose health information may also be important to your family.

### *How to obtain funeral home records*

Use a directory:

- Online: [www.funeralnet.com](http://www.funeralnet.com)
- Book: National Yellow Book of Funeral Directors (Youngstown, Ohio: Nomis Publications. FHL book 973 U24y.) This book is arranged by state, then by town. It gives addresses, phone numbers, and other information about the funeral homes. Funeral directors near you should also have it.

Soapbox: Phone them, state what you need, and ask when you can call back. Writing takes more of their time and you have to wait longer. Please treat them like the “golden goose” they are.

## Obituaries

In the late 1800s, newspapers began to publish obituaries on a regular basis. Even today, it is one of the most popular sections. The cause of death was often included in earlier years, but may be masked or omitted altogether now.

### *How to obtain obituaries*

- Many obituaries within the last 10 years or so can be found online. A search for “Obituaries” will find several sites.
- Contact public libraries in the area. If they have copies, they may search for a small fee.
- Most states have made an effort to obtain old newspapers. Try state archives, libraries, or major universities.

## United States Censuses

### *Health clues from censuses, 1850–1930*

Beginning in 1850, censuses started giving information about every person in each household. Each census has health clues to notice, such as:

- The age of the mother. Children born to older women may have health issues.
- A parent or child may have died. Death was more common than divorce until recently. Young deaths were often due to accidents, health issues, or genetics.
- You may find: a single-parent family, one parent with a different spouse, large gaps between children, and nieces, nephews, grandchildren with them.
- The occupation could affect health. For example, a hatter worked with chemicals that affected the brain, thus the term “mad hatter.”





# Make Family Health History a Tradition

## Genealogy Resources



### *Health clues from specific censuses*

- 1850–1880 Mortality Schedules give the date and cause of death.
- 1850–1880, and 1910 indicate if a person was blind, deaf, or dumb. Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes for 1880 gives more detail.
- 1900, 1920, and 1930 censuses on Ancestry.com allow you to search by relationships such as “patient” and “inmate” to find residents of hospitals, orphanages, and other institutions.

### *How to obtain census records*

1850–1930: Use [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com) at the Family History Library or at a Family History Center with an Internet connection. They have all census images and every-name indexes to most years.

In Utah, most public libraries have a subscription to ProQuest’s HeritageQuestOnline, which has all the census images and head-of-family indexes to several census years.

Microfilms of censuses and head-of-family indexes for many years are available at the Family History Library. 1940–present: These censuses have not been released to the public. Since proof of death is a requirement for obtaining census information on your direct line (parent, grandparent), you will already have more health information than the census will offer.

## Other Resources

Family items such as journals, religious records—even old prescription bottles—have clues to your family health history. Other records include hospitals, medical professionals, pensions, schools, passports, insurance forms, immigration, old newspaper articles (accidents or local health concerns), military, and occupational records. The list can go on and on. Check at the reference counters for ideas on how to find some of these records.

## Summary

Living family members are the best source for collecting your family health history. They are also the ones who will benefit the most from your work. We’re already looking at these records for family history. Why not collect your family’s health history as well. It may save the life of a child or grandchild. Your family health history is your gift to the future.

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